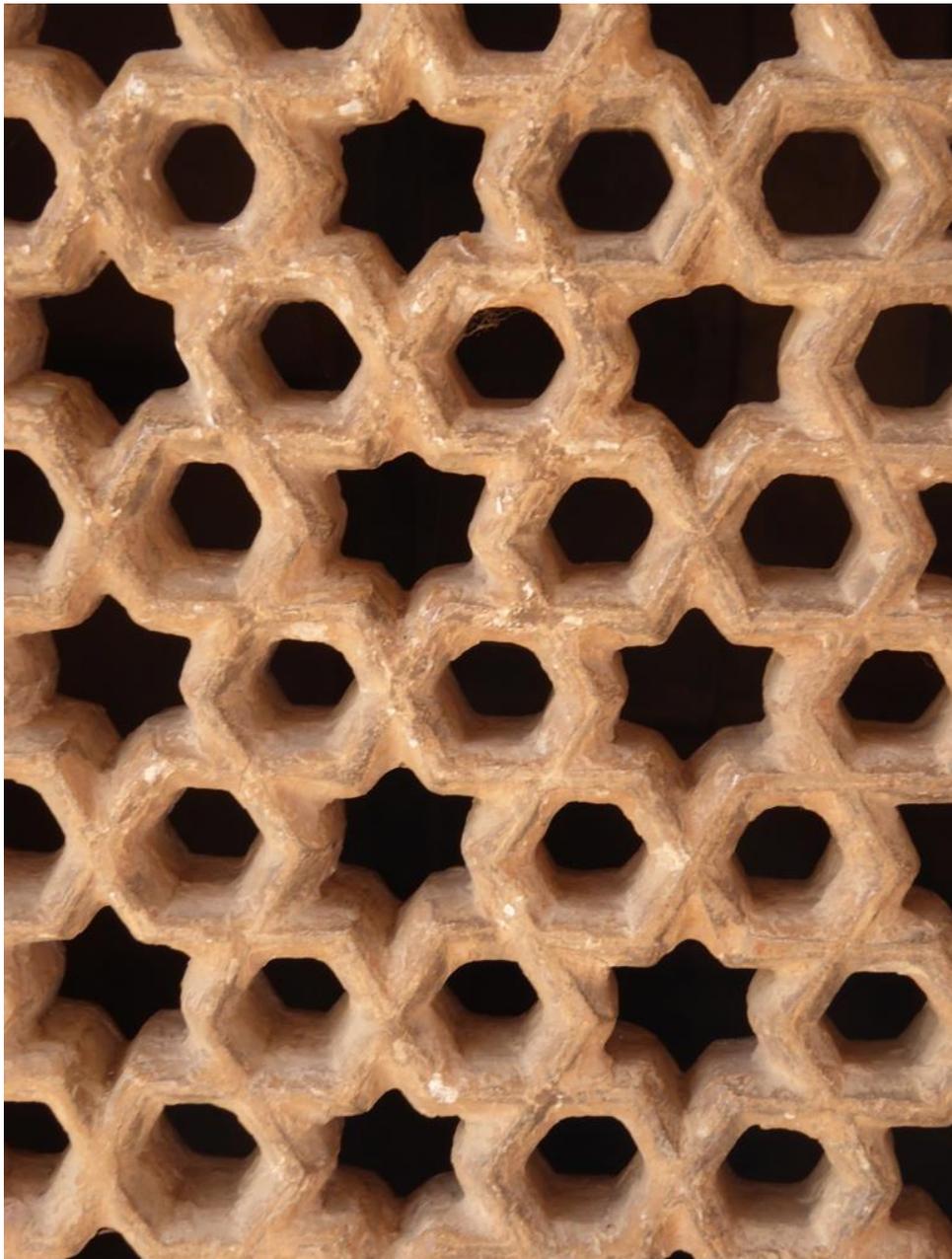

Resettlement



A survey by Independent Monitoring Boards of women being released from prison



Introduction

In February 2020 Independent Monitoring Boards in ten out of the twelve women's prisons carried out a survey of women being released from prison. Eighty prisoners were interviewed, as well as 25 staff and managers with responsibility for resettlement services. The questions used and names of prisons involved are in Annex 1.

Findings from the prisoners' interviews

Length of stay in prison

The prisoners interviewed were asked how long they had been in prison. Over half (58%) were serving less than six months, with a quarter serving less than one month.

Losing home as a result of imprisonment

A quarter of prisoners interviewed lost their home upon entry to prison, and 12% stated they were already homeless when they came into custody.

Accommodation on release

Of the 78 women who answered this question, less than a half (41%) said they had housing to go to upon release, with 45% saying they had no address to go to, and the remaining 14% saying they had only a temporary address.

Destination on release for those without a stable address

Of the women who had no address to go to or only had a temporary address, nearly a quarter (23%) said they didn't know where they would go, and a further 40% said they would be homeless. Twelve prisoners (28%) intended to stay with friends or family and 9% assumed they would find some form of temporary accommodation.

Help to prepare for release

Sixty percent said they had received help to prepare for release.

Prisoners were asked to rate the help they received on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Over half rated this help of no or little value (ie 1 or 2 on the scale.) Just over 20% rated it good or very good.

Help to stop offending

Over half (62%) said they had not received any help to stop offending. This may reflect the fact that many were serving very short terms of imprisonment.

Referral to community organisations

Prisoners were asked whether they had been put in touch with community organisations that might help with any drug/ alcohol or mental health problems or offer support with domestic abuse.

Forty percent confirmed that a referral had been made, with almost as many (38%) saying not. The remaining prisoners said this was either not needed or the help was already in place.

Findings from the resettlement staff interviews

Top three challenges in delivering resettlement services

By far the most common challenge was finding suitable housing and this was mentioned by 17 of the 25 interviewees. The difficulty in providing a meaningful service to those on short sentences was mentioned by nine respondents and finding employment by five. Motivating/engaging women, and getting good communication with community-based offender managers were mentioned by four respondents. Support for mental health conditions and identifying the right support in the community were mentioned by two respondents.

Proportion being released without accommodation

Six prisons were able to provide their own data for this question; a further four were unable to do so. Of those who had data available, one open prison reported that the percentage was 0-1% but the rest ranged from 15% to over 60%. In addition, it appeared that the closer to London, the worse the picture. It is worth noting that these proportions are lower than the self-reporting by the women interviewed, where responses indicated that nearly 60% overall had no settled accommodation.

Areas where there are specific housing problems

Most prisons had some problems with some areas. London was mentioned by four prisons.

Interventions provided

Housing - the community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) working in prisons provided support to retain housing or to find housing on release.

Employment - most prisons provided a basic service to improve employability on release, including help to write a curriculum vitae, advice on handling disclosure of offences. Some mentioned the offer of work placements.

Finance, benefit and debt - most prisons mentioned help provided by JobCentrePlus to sign on for benefits. Others mentioned help to get a bank account, money/debt management courses and help to address gambling.

Drugs and alcohol - some prisons ran a specific programme for those with substance misuse issues. Some had a specific substance misuse pre-release group.

Health - some prisons mentioned support for those with mental health conditions. Some prisons had a bespoke service for personality disorder.

Children and families - some prisons mentioned referral to voluntary agencies supporting the maintenance of family ties. One prison mentioned parenting courses.

Offending behaviour - some prisons ran the accredited programme on thinking skills whilst others ran other interventions aimed at improving decision making and changing patterns of behaviour. Three prisons had groups on managing anger and/or conflict.

Domestic abuse - most prisons reported running interventions targeted at those who had experience of domestic abuse. There was an emphasis on developing healthy relationships.

Sex work - two prisons mentioned interventions for those involved in sex work.

Other interventions - some but not all prisons reported running a pre-release group work programme. For some prisons this was focussed on the reality of release. Some prisons ran specific groups on coping with trauma whilst others had other types of support such as counselling. Some prisons ran a restorative justice intervention such as the Sycamore Tree.

Through the gate support - some prisons mentioned 'meet at the gate' arrangements. Boards also acknowledge the contribution that chaplaincy staff can make towards resettlement including their links with the local community.

Gaps in provision

The most frequently mentioned gaps were supported accommodation, counselling (especially in relation to bereavement) and better communication between agencies. Domestic and sexual abuse services was also mentioned.

Of the others the following were mentioned by more than one prison: vocational training, thinking skills, debt/finance/gambling.

One prison drew attention to the problem of releasing prisoners on a Friday especially where they have a long journey. This can leave women struggling to meet appointment commitments and unable to sort out accommodation for the weekend.

Commentary on the findings

One of the most striking findings is the proportion of women coming into prison on short sentences with maximum disruption to lives and minimum time available to provide meaningful rehabilitation and resettlement. Women are more likely than men to receive a short sentence, with 77% of sentences for women in 2019 being for less than 12 months.¹

Prisons and their partners have little time to address offending related needs and struggle to provide more than the most basic assistance.

¹ Ministry of Justice (2019) Court Outcomes by Police Force Area Data Tool, Criminal Justice System statistics

Homelessness is well known to increase the likelihood of reoffending. Research published by the Ministry of Justice in 2012 showed that prisoners who said they would need help finding somewhere to live when released were also more likely to be reconvicted than those who did not state that they needed this help (65% compared to 45%)².

Prisoners and resettlement staff identified finding suitable housing as the main challenge. In addition to increasing the likelihood of reoffending, living on the streets is a poor option for vulnerable women often with underlying mental health issues, victims of domestic and sexual abuse and suffering from previous trauma. All of these issues are over-represented in the female prison population. Although information was patchy, it did appear that prisons discharging people back to London had the most difficult challenge to find them suitable housing.

The prisoner approval rate for the resettlement offer was very low. The main comments were either that there was no help or that it was too late. In one prison where the IMB cross-referenced what the prisoner said with what the resettlement staff said was offered, there was often a mismatch: for example, one prisoner said that she had received minimal support whereas the CRC said that she had declined help with accessing benefits and linking up with community organisations. The prisoner's view about how much she had been helped was very different to the CRCs view about what she had been offered. There was a need for more clearly defined and publicised information about resettlement.

If the aim is to rehabilitate as well as resettle prisoners then more needs to be done to address re-offending.

There were some excellent services being offered in prisons by community/voluntary organisations. There were however some issues about the uncertainty of future funding.

There was some concern about poor communication from community-based offender managers. It was clear that the best resettlement plans were those where a multi-disciplinary approach had been taken bringing together prison, probation, CRC, health, and voluntary organisations both in the prison and in the community.

Some prisons were unable to provide data about those being released. Resettlement staff should be clear about whether their prison was making a difference or not.

There was a rich tapestry of interventions available within prisons. There was however a mismatch between what was available and what prisoners said they received. There was a range of issues cited including: prisoners not available for appointments because of low staffing, problems motivating and engaging some prisoners, not enough time to deliver interventions for short sentence prisoners.

Issues for IMBs

- Shared thematic monitoring across geographical or functional prison clusters is a valuable way of highlighting common concerns and escalating these to policy makers. Regional meetings can also consider this approach.

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278806/homelessness-reoffending-prisoners.pdf

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- Surveys of prisoners on the point of release, and prison/CRC resettlement managers, are recommended as a means of collecting evidence for IMB annual reports; these surveys could also look at particular issues for example whether the experiences or outcomes are different for prisoners with protected characteristics; this is an area being explored by Boards in the women's estate
 - Boards should continue to collect and publicise evidence on the impact of short sentences on resettlement and reoffending rates.

Recommendations

To the Secretary of State for Justice

The Minister should:

- take steps to minimise the number of women entering prison as a result of a short sentence;
- initiate discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Health colleagues with the aim of reducing the number of prisoners released without suitable housing and ensuring appropriate continuing health support.

To Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

HMPPS should ensure that:

- resettlement services are resourced sufficiently to ensure a consistent, needs-led approach;
- prisons have a clear resettlement offer that can be understood and easily accessed by prisoners;
- prisons deliver needs-led interventions aimed at reducing re-offending;
- data is collected about women released from prison without settled accommodation to identify and work with the local authorities to reduce homelessness.

Appendix 1

The IMBs participating in the project were: Eastwood Park, Low Newton, Foston Hall, Send, East Sutton Park, Askham Grange, Peterborough, Styal, Bronzefield, and Downview.

Shared Monitoring - Resettlement - Women

Identify the women being released the **week after** you administer the survey and ask as many as you can. Write in any comments the women make. This will help with writing a report.

	Question	Answer
1	How long have you been in this prison?	
2	Did you lose your home as a result of imprisonment?	
3	Do you have permanent, suitable and safe accommodation to go to on release?	
4	If not what will you do? Staying with friends/family Going to hostel/refuge Homeless/roofless Other	

	Question	Answer
5	Have you received help to prepare for re-lease? If so please rate it	1(poor).....2.....3.....4.....5(excellent)
6	What help have you received to stop you reoffending after you are released?	
7	If you have a drug/alcohol/mental health or domestic abuse issue have you been put in touch with community organisations that might help you?	

Shared Monitoring - Resettlement - Managers

Use this survey to ask the Manager(s) responsible for resettlement. If possible one each for the Prison, CRC and Probation managers. Write in any comments the managers make. This will help with writing a report. Do tell them we will be writing a report and might include their comments.

	Question	Answer
1	What is your role?	Prison/CRC/Probation
2	What are the top 3 challenges in preparing people for release?	

	Question	Answer
3	What proportion of people are released without suitable and safe accommodation?	
4	Are there any specific home areas where there are problems obtaining housing?	
5	What interventions are available in the prison to help people stop offending?	
6	Are there any gaps in provision?	



About Independent Monitoring Boards

Members of an IMB are from the local community, appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice under the Prison Act 1952. Each IMB has a duty to satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its establishment and (for prisons and YOIs) the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release; to inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom s/he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has; to report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the establishment has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner or detainee, every part of the establishment and all its records (except for personal medical records).

Interested in becoming an IMB member?

IMB members are independent, unpaid and work an average of 3-4 visits per month. Their role is to monitor the day-to-day life in their local prison or immigration removal centre and ensure that proper standards of care and decency are maintained.

A typical monitoring visit, for example, might include time spent in the kitchens, workshops, accommodation blocks, recreation areas, healthcare centre and chaplaincy. For more information and for details about how to apply, visit www.imb.org.uk

Note: At the time of publication, IMB visiting arrangements vary and many boards use remote monitoring, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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